STEP 14

ふたつの再会（さいかい）

AH, SO MUCH FUN!!
MAMA HASN'T FELT SO ENER-GETIC IN YEARS!!
HEY, HEY, AI!! DID YOU SEE MAMA ON STAGE?
EVERY-THING WENT PERFECTLY
ふっ
YEAH, YEAH, IT WAS PERFECT, AS GOOD AS EVER!!
WHY HAV-EN'T YOU CHANGED CLOTHES ALREADY!?
MY, AI IS SUCH A GROUCH!
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ポポポポポポポ

TH...THAT ISN'T TRUE!! MANAMI-SAN SAID I COULD LIFT THE SPIRITS OF OTHER PEOPLE
MANAMI?
カチン
IT'S TRUE THAT AI WAS VERY GOOD ON STAGE
!
BUT MAMA SAW THAT YOU DIDN'T INSPIRE THE SAME KIND OF FEELINGS SHE DID
THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID BEFORE!! SHE WAS THE PERSON WHO USED TO BE MY MANAGER!!
WOW, WHAT A COINCI-DENCE!
C'MON, DON'T YOU FOLLOW THE NEWS?
ドタ ドタ ドタ
MY NEW MANAGER IS ALSO NAMED MANAMI!
...HUH?

ばん
MAI-SAN, ARE YOU STILL HERE!?
WE NEED TO LEAVE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO GET TO THE NEXT RECORDING!!!
HUH...

A...
AI-CHAN !!?
MANAMI-SAN!!?
?
W-W-W-W-WHAT'S GOING ON HERE!?
WHAT'S MANAMI-SAN DOING AS MAMA'S MANAGER!!

I'M SORRY... I SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU RIGHT AWAY.
THERE WAS A LOT GOING ON SO I DIDN'T CONTACT YOU...
C...CALM DOWN, AI-CHAN
I WASN'T TRYING TO DEFEAT YOU
YOU TEAMED UP WITH MAMA TO DEFEAT ME!!? WHAT KIND OF REUNION IS THIS!!
わあああ
YEAH...
MY JOB WAS TO DELIVER EGG DROP SOUP...
I... AFTER I QUIT 876 PRO I ENDED UP WORKING IN A SUSHI RESTAU-RANT...
SUSHI?

ONE DAY MAI-SAN CAME IN DURING MY SHIFT...
THANK YOU FOR WAITING, MISS CUSTOMER.
PLEASE BE CAREFUL, IT'S VERY HOT.
I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU FOR A WHILE. YOU PUT ON A GOOD SHOW WITH THIS JOB.
HUH?
!?
I LIKE YOU!!
SHOPKEEPER!! LET ME GET TAKEOUT ON THIS KID HERE!!

...AND THAT'S HOW I SUDDENLY GOT SCOUTED FOR THIS...
ポカーン
EH!? WAIT
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE!?
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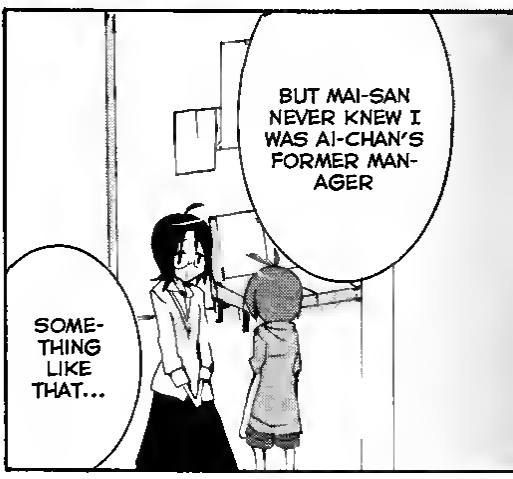
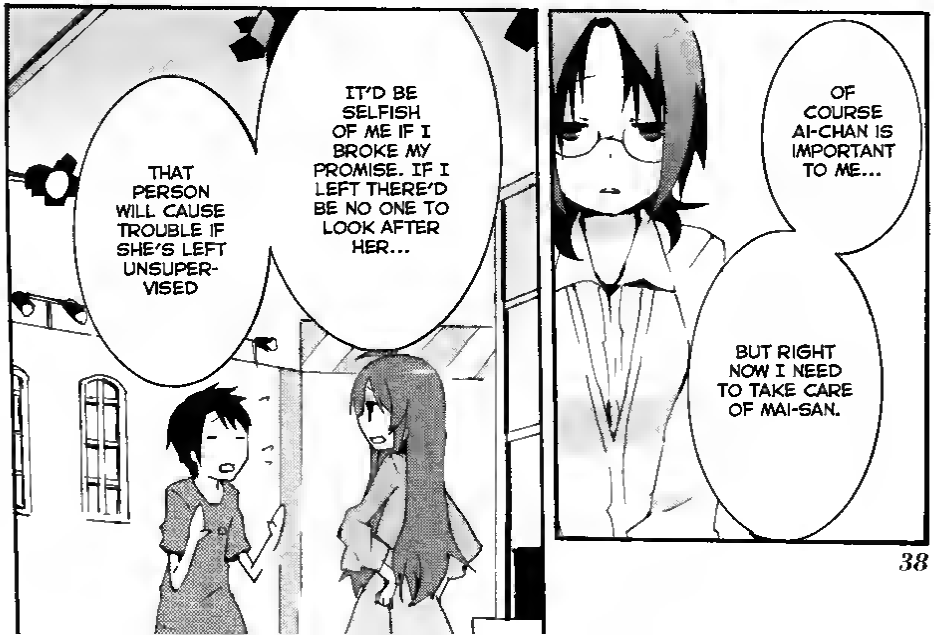
I WAS ALSO SURPRISED, SINCE I KNEW WHO HIDAKA MAI-SAN WAS IMMEDIATELY ...
あぁ...
S...SO THAT'S HOW IT WENT...
IT SOUNDS UNBELIEV-ABLE, BUT IT'S EXACTLY LIKE SOME-THING MAMA WOULD DO...!!

BUT YOU KNOW... WITH THIS KIND OF WORK NOW
I'M GLAD I GET TO FOLLOW ALONG WITH AI-CHAN'S WORK, TOO...


BUT MAI-SAN NEVER KNEW I WAS AI-CHAN'S FORMER MAN-AGER
SOME-THING LIKE THAT...

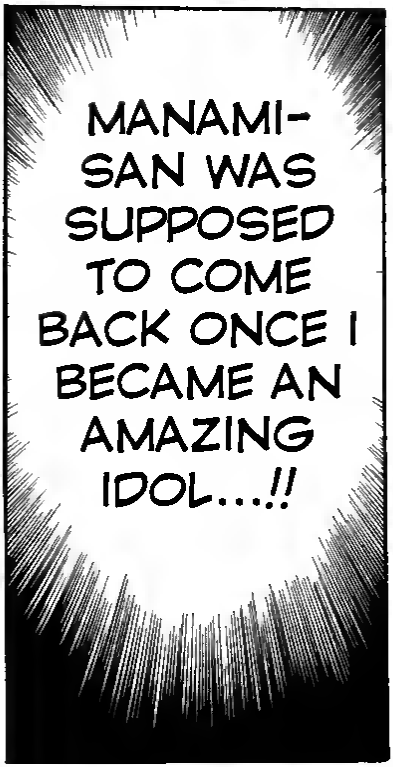
I'M A POPULAR IDOL NOW!! ISN'T IT OKAY TO WORK FOR ME!?
IN THAT CASE... DO IT FOR ME!!
I SEE... YOU GOT DRAGGED INTO WORK-ING FOR MAMA
...BUT...
?
I CAN'T STAND TO BE ON THE OPPO-SITE SIDE AS MANAMI-SAN!!
THAT'S WHY... THAT'S WHY, PLEASE COME BACK!!

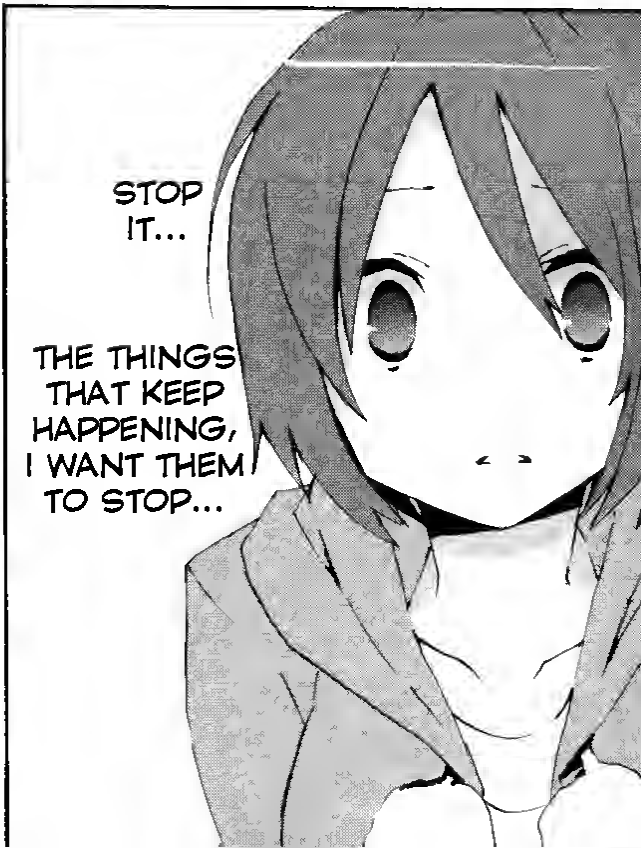
AI-CHAN...
I'M SORRY... I CAN'T DO THAT RIGHT NOW...
!?


OF COURSE AI-CHAN IS IMPORTANT TO ME...
BUT RIGHT NOW I NEED TO TAKE CARE OF MAI-SAN.
IT'D BE SELFISH OF ME IF I BROKE MY PROMISE. IF I LEFT THERE'D BE NO ONE TO LOOK AFTER HER...
THAT PERSON WILL CAUSE TROUBLE IF SHE'S LEFT UNSUPER-VISED

IT'D BE A BIG MESS IF I LEFT HER ALONE IN A TV STATION.
THAT'D BE EMBARASSING FOR AI-CHAN, TOO, RIGHT?
BUT... BUT...
I WANT MANAMI-SAN, TOO...
MANAMI~N, I FINISHED CHANGING CLOTHES, WHERE DO WE GO NOW?
AH, YES, WAIT JUST A MOMENT PLEASE!
AH, MANAMI-SA...
THERE'S ACTUALLY A MEETING BEFORE THE RECORDING...
WELL, SEE YOU LATER, AI-CHAN.
I'M ALWAYS CHEERING FOR YOU.

YES, IT'S TRUE...
WHAT, WHAT? YOU KNOW AI!?


MANAMI-SAN WAS SUPPOSED TO COME BACK ONCE I BECAME AN AMAZING IDOL...!!

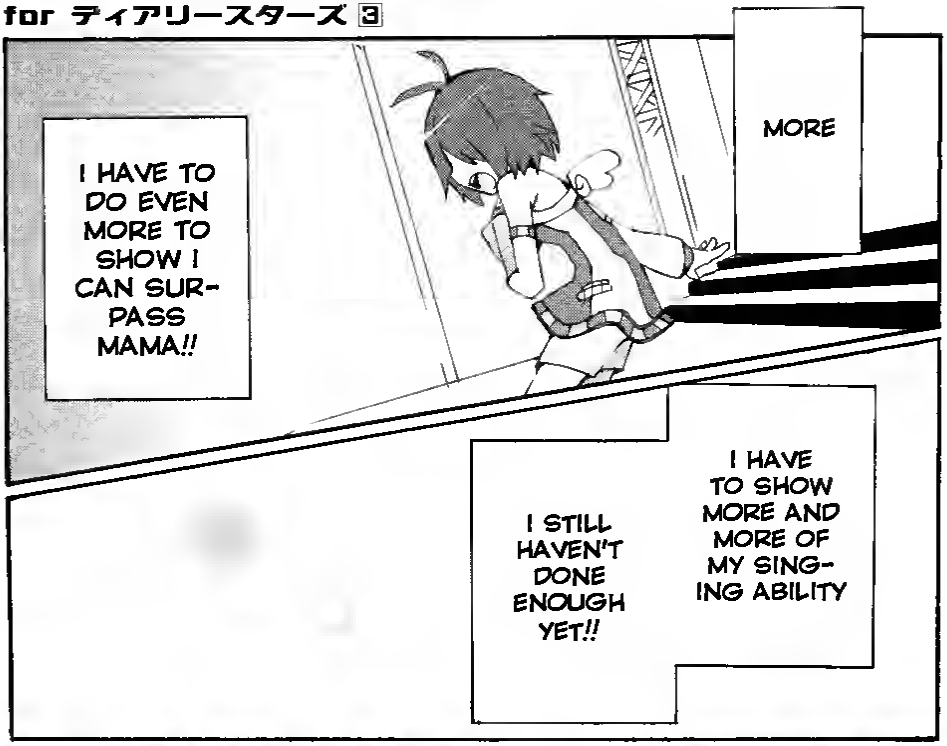

STOP IT...
THE THINGS THAT KEEP HAPPENING, I WANT THEM TO STOP...

I COULDN'T WIN AGAINST MAMA'S TALENT!!!
I COULDN'T WIN
ゴゴゴゴ
!?
AI WAS SPECIALLY REQUESTED FROM THE TOP...
ALRIGHT, TODAY THERE IS AN EVENT AT THE DOME FOR A TV STATION'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY...

THAT'S WRONG!!
W...WHAT'S WRONG? YOU STARTED TREMBLING FOR SOME REASON... THE WIND?
I...I SEE...
BECAUSE TODAY ALL I WANT TO DO IS SING AND SING AND SING UNTIL I CAN'T SING ANYMORE!!!
MY BODY IS BURNING UP
LIKE MY BLOOD IS BOILING!!
YEAH !!
WHEN I'M THIS MOTIVATED I DON'T EVEN NEED TO THINK, THERE'S NOTHING THAT CAN STOP ME!!

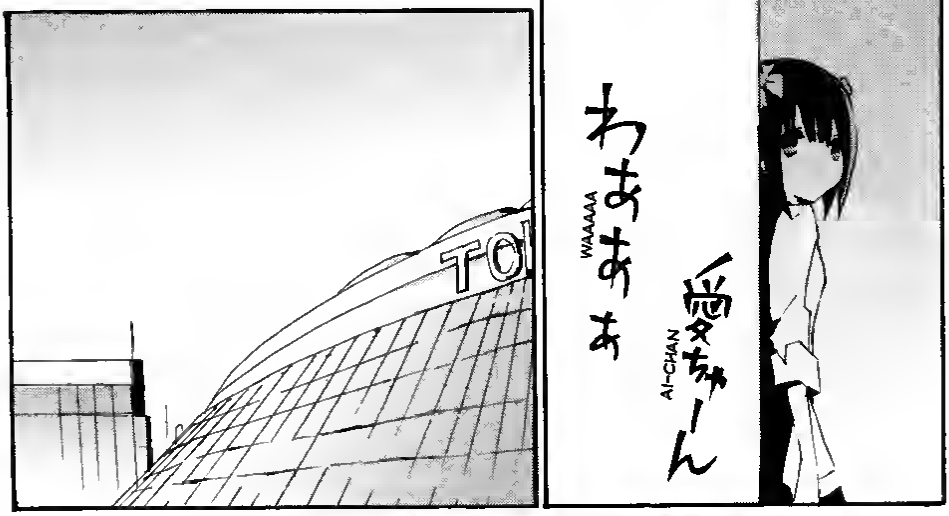
HELLO EVERYONE, AND WELCOME TO THE SUPERSHOW CELEBRATING OUR 50 YEARS IN BROADCASTING!!
TODAY WE'RE BRINGING YOU A POPULAR IDOL FROM THE DOME!!
THE TOP RUNNER
HIDAKA AI!!!

IT'S TIME FOR ME TO START
MY OWN STORY
UWAH... TODAY AI-CHAN IS REALLY EAGER, HUH
WHY SO LOUD...?
BRAND NEW TOUCH LET'S START
SAY "HELLO!!"


I HAVE TO DO EVEN MORE TO SHOW I CAN SURPASS MAMA!!
MORE
I HAVE TO SHOW MORE AND MORE OF MY SINGING ABILITY
I STILL HAVEN'T DONE ENOUGH YET!!

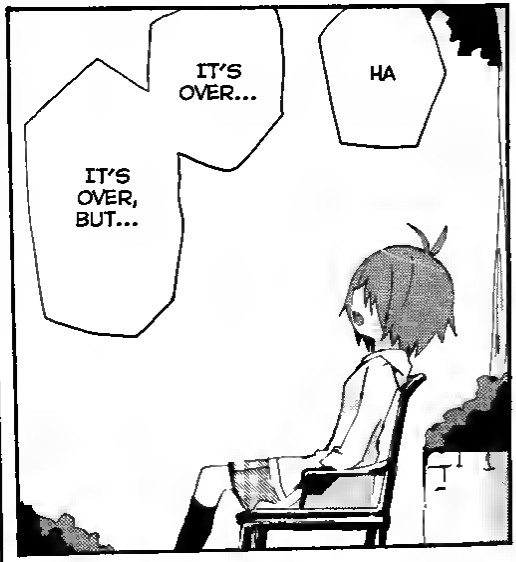
I CAN'T STOP... NOT UNTIL THE DAY I CAN TAKE BACK MANAMI-SAN
TAKE HER BACK... TAKE HER BACK,
TAKE HER BACK!!!

I WON'T LOSE
TO ANYONE EVER AGAIN!!
NONSTOP TO THE NEXT SONG
LET'S GO!!!


わあああ
WAAAA
愛ちゃーん
AI-CHAN

HA
HA

I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO
MY BREATH-ING HASN'T GONE BACK TO NORMAL...


IT'S OVER...
HA
IT'S OVER, BUT...

THE EVENT IS ALREADY OVER
BUT MY HEART IS STILL POUNDING ...!
UU...
WHAT DO I DO
I WANT TO DO MORE... I WANT TO SING MORE...!!
UWAA AAH
MY EMO-TIONS JUST WON'T CALM DOWN!!

UWAA AAN
AAAA AAH
THIS GIRL HERE
WHAT'S WRONG?

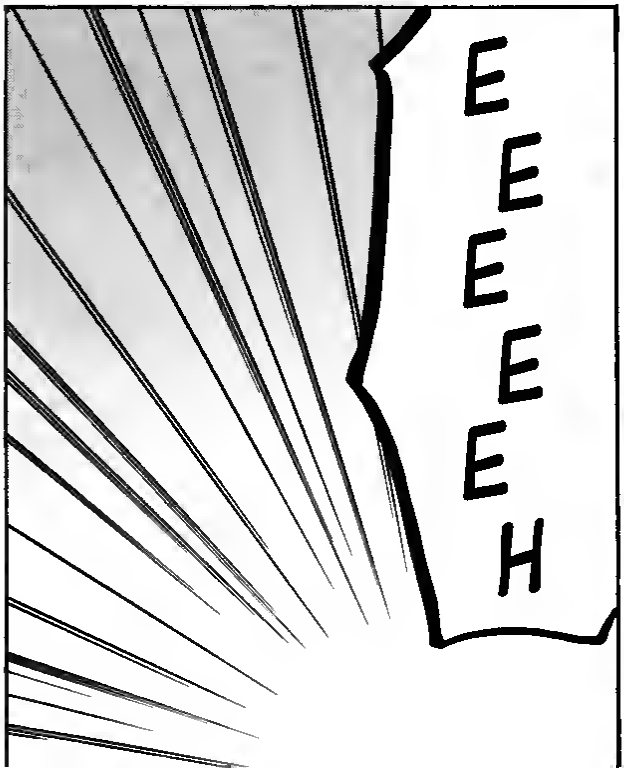
I WAS GETTING WORRIED LOOKING FOR YOU.
THIS HAS HAP-PENED BEFORE, HUH?

HARUKA-SAN!!?
IT'S BEEN A WHILE, AI-CHAN!! HAVE YOU BEEN WELL?
HA...
HA...
O...OF COURSE I'VE BEEN FINE!!
UM, SINCE THEN I'VE BEEN FOLLOWING IN YOUR FOOTSTEPS, HARUKA-SAN.
YEP, I SAW ON TV THAT AI-CHAN HAS BECOME SUCCESSFUL!
I'VE BEEN WATCHING ALL OF AI-CHAN'S EVENTS UNTIL NOW.
I'M SURPRISED HOW POWERFUL YOU'VE BECOME!

BECAUSE HARUKA-SAN WAS MY MOST IMPORT-ANT BENE-FACTOR
I HAVEN'T EVEN THANKED YOU PROPERLY BEFORE...
EEEH!? YOU WERE WATCH-ING ...!!
I'M SORRY, I NEVER NOTICED ...!!
YOU SAY IT LIKE IT'S A SERIOUS ISSUE.
...I'M GLAD, THOUGH! IT LOOKS LIKE MY HUNCH WAS COR-RECT.
BUT IF IT WASN'T FOR HARUKA-SAN I WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE BECOME AN IDOL!!
THERE'S NO NEED FOR SUCH THANKS! I ONLY HELPED A LIT-TLE BIT!
ON THAT DAY WHEN I SAW AI-CHAN SING-ING HAPPILY
I THOUGHT THIS KID HAD A LOT OF POTENTIAL.

EHE, NO WAY...
BUT I HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH BEING ABLE TO STAND ON THE SAME STAGE
UM, HARUKA-SAN, WHAT DO YOU MEAN THE SAME STAGE ...?
h?
HUH? DON'T TELL ME YOU DIDN'T HEAR ABOUT IT?

AI-CHAN'S NEXT AUDITION
I'VE BEEN INVITED


EEEEEH

EH